

No. 16. On Family Prayer.

Joshua 24th, 15th.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

The uneasinesses which are every day occasioned in families, especially those wherein the worship of God is neglected, either thro' the indiscretion or profligacy of the people who compose them, are often attended with such inconvenience, disgrace, and misfortune, as to render every father and every master solicitous, one would think, to guard against them. If a child has stepped into the path of folly or vice, each individual participates the calamity; each, as he passes along, perceives the finger of scorn pointing towards him, or hears the tongue of malevolence insulting his distress. If a servant has been betrayed by the artful, or seduced by the profligate into shame, and poverty, and ruin; can those, under whose protection such servant lived, be unmoved with the misfortune? The unhappy being, whom perhaps they can no longer keep under their roof, may be without parents, without friends, without

money, and, by one unfortunate step, may be reduced from a state of comfort, to all the poignancy of disgrace, the misery of want, or the severity of punishment—

Can the master of the family, in such a case, exculpate himself? It appears from observation, and is confirmed by Scripture, that there is no effectual way of preserving innocence, and engaging fidelity, than by instilling principles of piety and religion: "make the tree good and its fruit will be good." Would you then communicate religious principles? Assemble your family regularly to worship God. And should the blessing of God this day so far accompany the word as to prevail with you to adopt the resolution, and follow the example of the Author of my Text, idleness, intemperance, dishonesty, profligacy will quit your habitations, and, in their stead, industry, sobriety, integrity. Religion will take up their abode with you.

It is intended in this discourse to shew the necessity and advantages of Family Worship, and then earnestly to exhort you to the regular observance of it.

"In God, we live & move, & have our being."

The breath we draw, the food we eat, are the blessings of His Providence, & the overflowings of His goodness. Is it not incumbent on us then to acknowledge our dependence, & confess His power? To act otherwise is to live as though we were independent of Him.

When we consider our relation to God, as members of a family, the obligation to join in worshipping Him becomes still greater. For if one member of a family suffer, all the members suffer, in some sort, with him. Their comfort and welfare are, in a certain degree, inseparable. And is not this consideration a strong & prevailing Call upon every head of a family to join with his household in deprecating the displeasure, and supplicating the favor of God? Does not every one, before he retires at night to rest, feel the propriety of beseeching God "to deliver him and all his house from lightning & tempest, from murder and from sudden death?"

But an obligation to the serious and devout observance of Family Worship arises from the profession of Christianity. Religion is such a blessing to mankind it is incumbent on us to extend the knowledge & enforce the practice of it as far, and as powerfully, as we are able.

Now let any man, whose family consists chiefly of persons uneducated, consider how many amongst them live without a sense of God and Religion, and he must be hard-hearted indeed if he refuses to "make them," when it is in his power, "wise unto salvation." If he thinks their souls worth saving he will join with them in fervent prayers to God. = To instruct their servants, and be solicitous for their eternal welfare may appear to some people unnecessary, perhaps, unworthy their situation and rank in life: But situation and rank are soon to cease. When we stand at God's Tribunal to behold one of our family, who, through our want of religious instruction and domestic worship, has incurred the displeasure of God, will rack us with all the keen part

ness of reproach, and the torture of condemnation.

There is another argument I would urge to recommend the necessity of family prayer, and it will not, I trust, be urged to considerate and well-meaning people in vain. The excellent Institution of Sunday Schools now making its way through several parts of this kingdom, whose end is to bring up the rising generation in the true faith and fear of God, will be less useful, it is to be feared, by the ignorance & profligacy of the parents. The Clergy, the Magistrates, and those who employ the poor will be enabled, we trust in God, to convince them by arguments, to persuade them by entreaties, to engage them by kindnesses to give their children the blessings this institution so humanely and so religiously offers. But from the manner in which the Parents, and those who may soon become Parents, are brought up; from their utter ignorance of the truths of Christianity, and the total want of principle which discovers itself in the conduct of a great part of the lower class of mankind, there is much rea-

son to apprehend, that, in the present generation, so much good will not be derived from such excellent establishments as we are sanguine enough to expect. Would every master of a family, therefore, who is a well-wisher to them, give them his support by religiously worshipping God with all his domestics in his own house, it might without presumption be supposed that the several members of his family would be actuated, in some measure, by religious principles; and that, when they had children or families of their own, they would bring them up with more decency and piety than if they had never lived in a family which worshipped God. = Such are the arguments I would urge to prevail with you to introduce family prayer into your houses.

I now proceed to shew the advantages resulting from the practice.

And the first I shall mention is, that it is the natural tendency of prayer to render a family happy. For if the happiness of a family consists in each per-

son's behaving with propriety in his sphere of life; in cheerfully undertaking, and faithfully discharging those duties which his station requires; in manifesting a quiet temper, tractable disposition, and complacent mind, where are those amiable qualities so likely to be found as "in the dwellings of the righteous?" Can it be supposed that such grievous complaints would be made of our servants and domestics, of their want of attachment and fidelity, if we ourselves were careful to assemble them daily in the more immediate presence of God Almighty? Every head of a family, who is regular in the discharge of domestic worship, takes the most likely means to have his business punctually done, to render his servants strictly honest, and to persuade them to be truly religious. For what can have so strong a tendency to inspire the drunkard, the swearer, the thief, the liar with an abhorrence of his vices, as to condemn him every night by his own prayers?

Now if family prayer be productive of such blessings, both temporal and spiritual, will not every one

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be solicitous to entail them upon his own family? Let him nourish them in himself, let him cultivate in others religious affections. When he considers to what evils his children may be exposed when they go out into the world, what innumerable snares will be laid in their way, will he not wish to have this consolation, that he has united with them his supplications to the throne of Grace, that the "Almighty would never leave them nor forsake them?" But what is this life in comparison of eternity? What is their success here to their happiness hereafter? Now, can there be any thing so extremely absurd, so inconceivably inconsistent as the acquainting our children that, on God we depend for happiness, and never joining with them to beg it of Him? Can they believe we are above all things desirous, that they should partake of "the bliss at God's right hand," when we are never importunate with God to obtain it for them? And with what face can we exhort them to worship God, if, either in the congregation, in our closet, or our family, we neglect

worshipping Him ourselves? By offering up our prayers every day with our children, a real sense of God and religion will be impressed on their hearts; and, happy Parents, and thrice happy Children! "they will grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" they will resemble, in their early days, those trees, which, in warmer Climes, produce at once both blossoms and fruit; they will be the admiration of the young, the delight of the aged, the consolation of their parents, the servants and the children of God.

Another advantage arising from the practice of family prayer is, that it is promoting the design of the Gospel. By praying daily with your children, you will bring them up in such a habit of piety, it is more than probable they will continue in their own families the custom you imposed by precept, & taught by example. As the sap, bred at the root, communicates itself to the several branches, so will your piety exert its influence, and diffuse its splendor in the conduct of

your offspring: successive generations may be indebted to you for the piety of their lives and the acceptance of their God.

I will briefly mention another advantage accruing from the practice of family worship: were this duty regularly performed, the master of the family could not consistently spend his evenings in drinking and dissipation. No—he would be innocently, perhaps usefully, employed in his own house. Instead of drinking to excess, squandering his substance, and behaving to his family like a savage or a tyrant; if he constantly practised the duty of family prayer, he would of consequence become exemplary in his conduct; for he would be anxious for both the present and future welfare of his children; and would cultivate in his own mind all those qualities & dispositions he wishes to hold be exercised towards himself. For he would be ashamed of giving way to intemperance who had afterwards supplicate God to preserve him from it: he could not be detained in loose and idle company till his family

had retired to rest, whose fixed purpose it was to join with them in worshipping God.

It may seem strange that any objections should be made to a duty in itself so reasonable; in its effects so beneficial; suggested by natural, enforced by revealed religion: objections, however, to the utter disgrace, I pray God it may not be to the final condemnation of Christians, are frequently urged. I have only time to take notice of one. It is said, that, where families are large, little good is derived from the celebration of family worship; that the family, almost individually, attend it with reluctance; &, that they do not consider for what end they are called together. This objection to family prayer becomes the strongest argument for the necessity of it. The man who has such an household, cannot too soon, nor too earnestly strive to reclaim them. Let him assemble them, not as he would confine a flock of sheep in a fold; but let him not tell them he is sorry he has lived so long in the neglect of this important duty; that he will ob-

serve it during the remainder of his life; that the design of it is to give glory to God; to beg His blessing and protection, and to render both himself and family happy to all eternity. This communication will be received, tho' not perhaps by all, yet certainly by some, with satisfaction and pleasure. And what time is so proper as the evening of this day, when, if your children and domestics are now at church, their minds will be prepared for it?

I will beg leave to detain you a little longer, whilst I earnestly, I pray God I may effectually, exhort you to the regular observance of this important duty.

It is a just reproach to the members of the established Church, that the duty I am now recommending is more neglected by us than, I believe, any other communion of Christians. And the reproach is aggravated by considering that those "who go out from" "us," when they join themselves to any other congregation, generally establish this duty in their families. Such of us who live in the neglect may be said "to famo

"have not the knowledge of God." We live in the profession of the true Religion: the source is pure; the channels through which its refreshing streams are conveyed are free and unmixed; but they fall upon a soil too often, alas! barren of improvement. Yet we do not surely make a profession of Religion by accident: we are initiated into it not by custom, I trust, but by piety; we have adopted it not by chance, I hope, but from principle. I exhort you, therefore, my Brethren, in the name of God, to let your practice be correspondent to your profession. Are we members of a pure and reformed Church? Are we desirous of making our Religion productive of immortal happiness? Let us then not be so deceived as to suppose that we can be saved without a vital spirit of piety. And in whatever dwellings that vital spirit resides, there "will be heard from" the voice of joy and salvation." Is the loving kindness of God the theme of your thanksgivings? Is His mercy the subject of your supplications in your family? "You are not far," it may be presumed,

"from the kingdom of God." But you who live in
 the neglect of this duty; who receive so many mercies
 and blessings from the God of all goodness, without
 joining your acknowledgements with those who partake
 of them, shall I congratulate you on the security of
 your situation? No. It is my duty to exhort you,
 it is your interest to attend to the exhortation, "to flee
 "from the wrath to come." Is prayer in your fam-
 ily a duty you owe to God? And dare you live in
 the neglect of that duty? Look around you; look into
 the history of mankind; and see "whether any hath
 "hardened himself against God and prospered." And
 is it not hardening yourselves against God, if, when
 ye are convinced by reason, admonished by conscience,
 and commanded by Revelation to join in devout sup-
 plications with your whole house in the worship of God,
 ye are either diverted by amusements, or withheld by
 inclination from the discharge of this reasonable, this
 important service? Look forward to the awful period
 when you shall be struck by the hand of death; when

you shall lie upon the bed from which you must arise
 by borrowed strength, and let me appeal to your hearts
 if you do not think the pangs of separation from your
 family would be rendered less violent by the reflection
 of having uniformly and devoutly discharged the duty
 I am now recommending? Had God in His an-
 ger refused to hear your prayers; had He commanded
 you not to appear before the throne of Grace; though you
 might be surrounded with abundance; though you lived
 in the vigor of health; though you were beloved by your
 family, idolized by your friends, revered by the
 world; all these reflections, soothing as they are,
 "would avail you nothing;" you would envy the
 situation of those who daily "go to their work and to
 their labor until the evening," if He "who heareth
 Prayer" accepted their petitions and granted their
 requests. If then either fear can awaken, or interest
 can engage you to begin this necessary duty; if affec-
 tion for your families, if the dread of God's displeasure,
 if the hopes of immortal happiness impress your minds;

let me prevail with every master of a family here present to consecrate his house this very night to God, to erect in it an Altar unto God, and offer upon it "the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." Let me have the satisfaction, my Brethren, of knowing that the Gospel has not this day been preached unto you in vain. This night, and every succeeding one, assemble your families to beg the Blessing of God, to acknowledge your sense of His mercies, and to beseech Him, "that the life ended, you may dwell with Him in the life everlasting."

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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